

Message Text

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16

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00

NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-05 MC-02 AID-05

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FM AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 4522

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAPE TOWN 0373

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SF

SUBJECT: LAIRD SAYS US REASSESSING ARMS EMBARGO ON SOUTH
AFRICA

1. EMBASSY PRETORIA IS REPORTING SEPARATELY DETAILS OF FRONT-PAGE
BANNER HEADLINE STORY IN RAND DAILY MAIL TODAY WHICH SAYS FORMER
US DEFENSE SECRETARY MELVYN LAIRD HAS STATED THAT "AS A RESULT OF
SOUTH AFRICA'S DETENTE POLICY, THE US WAS REASSESSING ITS EMBARGO
ON ARMS FOR SOUTH AFRICA." STATEMENT WAS MADE IN APRIL FIRST
PRESS CONFERENCE APPARENTLY CALLED BY LAIRD, WHO IS VISITING SA IN
CONNECTION WITH HIS ASSOCIATION WITH READER'S DIGEST. SIMILAR
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BUT MUCH BRIEFER STORY ON LOWER FRONT PAGE OF CAPE TIMES TODAY,

HEADLINED "RETHINK ON ARMS EMBARGO ON SA." ADDS THAT LAIRD STATED AFRICA'S MOVES TOWARDS DETENTE HAVE "OPENED UP BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATION" BETWEEN THE US AND SOUTH AFRICA.

2. LAIRD'S COMMENTS ARE BOUND TO RESURRECT BELIEF IN SOME CIRCLES THAT US POLICY IS "TILTING" IN FAVOR OF WHITE SOUTH AFRICA. CERTAINLY SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS, AND PROBABLY SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT, WILL GIVE FULL PLAY TO THIS THEME, AS THEY HAVE ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS. BECAUSE OF THIS, AND ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF CLOSE ATTENTION WHICH OTHER AFRICAN STATES AND MANY AFRICANS IN SA GIVE TO STORIES ABOUT US POLICY TOWARD SOUTH AFRICA, WE BELIEVE IT IMPERATIVE THAT USG REFUTE LAIRD'S STATEMENT ABOUT ARMS EMBARGO, UNLESS THERE IS IN FACT SOME TRUTH TO IT. FAILURE DIRECTLY TO REFUTE STATEMENT OF THIS KIND AND OFFSET THE INEVITABLE EXAGGERATIONS AND ELABORATIONS BY SA PRESS WOULD REINFORCE SOUTH AFRICAN AND OTHER AFRICAN DISINCLINATION TO BELIEVE OTHER US STATEMENTS TO CONTRARY AND PROVIDE GRIST FOR RADICAL AFRICAN PROPAGANDISTS WHO REPEATEDLY ACCUSE USG OF SECRET COLLUSION WITH SAG.

3. IF OUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CONTINUING US POLICY ARE CORRECT, REQUEST DEPARTMENT IMMEDIATELY AUTHORIZE EMBASSY TO ISSUE PRESS STATEMENT NOTING THAT MR. LAIRD WAS SPEAKING AS A PRIVATE CITIZEN AND NOT FOR THE USG; AND THAT WHILE POLICY EVALUATION IS A NEVERENDING PROCESS WITHIN THE USG, NO SPECIFIC "REASSESSMENT" IS BEING MADE OF THE ARMS EMBARGO AND THERE IS CURRENTLY NO LIKELIHOOD OF ANY CHANGE IN US ARMS POLICY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, DETENTE, ARMS, EMBARGOES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975CAPET00373
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750113-0890
From: CAPE TOWN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750491/aaaademg.tel
Line Count: 90
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15 MAY 2003 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <19 MAY 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LAIRD SAYS US REASSESSING ARMS EMBARGO ON SOUTH AFRICA
TAGS: PFOR, SF, US, (LAIRD, MELVIN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006